The American Church Union

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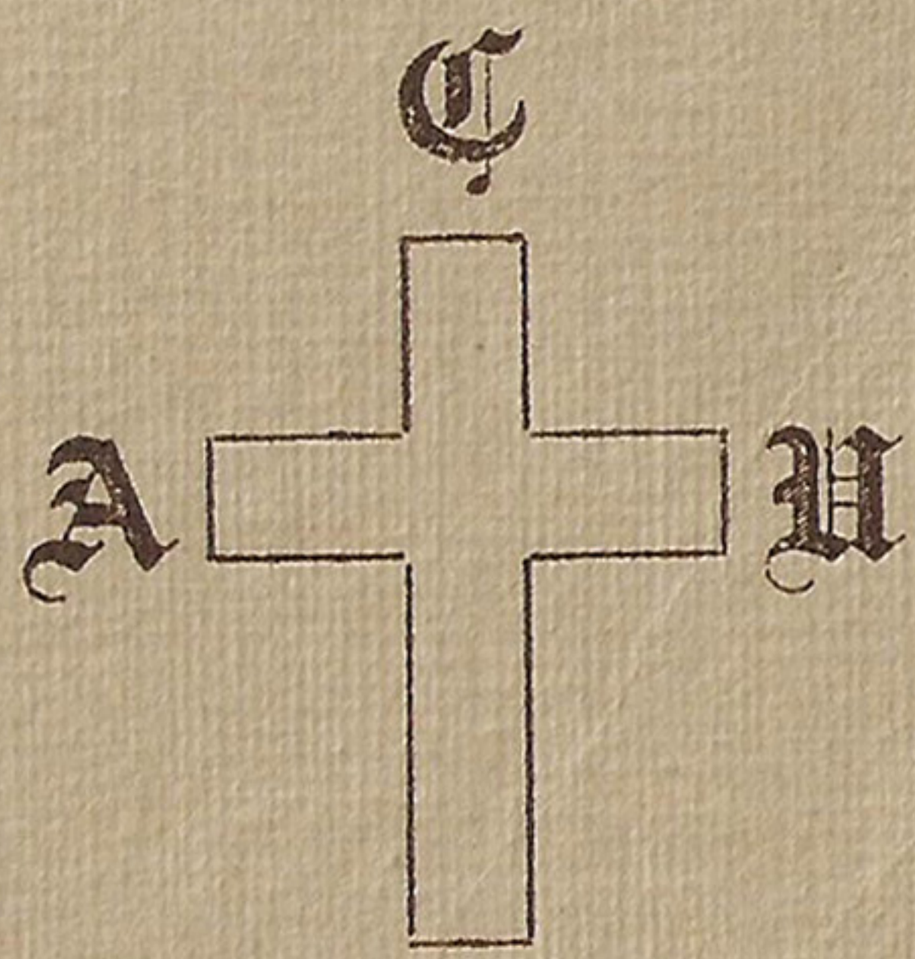

The American Church Union:

Its Origin, Organization, Aims, Principles, Methods and Work

By ELLIOT WHITE, B. D.
Rector of Grace Church
Newark, New Jersey

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THE AMERICAN CHURCH UNION

ITS ORIGIN, ORGANIZATION, AIM, PRINCIPLES, METHODS AND WORK

ORIGIN

Early in May, 1908, a few priests and laymen met in the City of Newark, New Jersey, to consider the propriety of organizing a society having for its purpose the maintenance and defence of the Church's standards.

The thoughts of those assembled turned, naturally perhaps, to the English Church Union, which for some fifty years has done a noble work in fighting the battles of the Mother Church. A perusal of the literature of that Society, however, quickly showed that a branch of the English Union in this country would not answer the purpose in mind. The problems which confront the Church of England are different from our own. Moreover, the English Church Union is closely identified with a particular school of thought, and it was felt that it would be more helpful to gather into the proposed society, Churchmen of all schools, who loved the Book of Common Prayer and accepted its teaching *ex animo* and in an historic sense. Accordingly, while the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION has the same general purpose as its English namesake—"to defend and maintain unimpaired the doctrine and discipline of the Church"—the work and methods of the two bodies run on parallel, rather than on identical lines.

Having these general principles in mind, a call was sent out to representative clergy and laity in New York and vicinity, to meet at Hoboken, New Jersey, June 25th, 1908. One Bishop and twenty priests and laymen, about equally divided in number, met and organized the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION. A Declaration of Principles was carefully drawn up and a committee appointed to select officers. In March, 1909, a President was chosen. At subsequent meetings a Constitution and By-Laws were drafted and adopted, the work of the Union planned and carried out.

ORGANIZATION

There are three classes of members in the Union: Life members, Ordinary members and Associate members. They must be Communicants of the Church. Life and Ordinary members must be men; Associates, either men or women. Unless objection is raised, applicants become members upon signifying in writing their assent to the Union's principles, and sending their dues to the Treasurer. Bishops, upon their written endorsement of the Principles, are enrolled as Honorary Vice-Presidents. The fee for Life membership is $20; Ordinary membership, $1 annually; and Associate membership, 25 cents annually. If more convenient, members may pay their dues several years in advance. Members joining three months before the annual meeting in October are exempt from the dues of that fiscal year.

The government of the Union is vested in a Council consisting of a President, three elected Vice-Presidents, Recording and Corresponding

Secretaries, Treasurer, and nine other members. These latter are elected for three years; the other officers are chosen annually.

The officers of course change from year to year. At the date of writing, 1910, they are as follows:

President: Clinton Rogers Woodruff, Esq., Philadelphia.

Honorary Vice-Presidents: The Rt. Reverend Bishops of Colorado, Dallas, Fond du Lac, Coadjutor of Fond du Lac, Michigan City, Milwaukee, Nebraska, Quincy, Salina and Southern Florida. The Union lost one vice-president by death—the Rt. Rev. George DeNormandie Gillespie, D. D., Bishop of Western Michigan.

Vice-Presidents Elected: Rev. F. M. Clendenin, D. D., of West Chester, N. Y., Rev. F. T. Henstridge of South Pasadena, Cal., and Mr. W. S. Stirling, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Recording Secretary: Col. E. A. Stevens, of Hoboken, New Jersey.

Corresponding Secretary: Rev. Elliot White, of Newark, New Jersey.

Treasurer: Mr. C. A. Grummon, 15 Wall Street, New York City.

Other Members of the Council: Revs. John S. Miller, of Newark; Frank B. Reazor, D. D., of West Orange, N. J.; Arthur Lowndes, D. D., of New York; Hon. E. G. Bradford, of Wilmington, Del.; Mr. Robert G. Hone, of New York; Mr. William R. Howe, of Orange; Mr. Nathaniel W. Salladé, of Fond du Lac; Mr. Charles G. Saunders, of Boston; and Hon. John S. Stiness, of Providence.

The By-Laws of the Union provide for the organization of Diocesan Branches. Three such branches are in existence; at Baltimore, Los Angeles and Cincinnati. They are doing useful work.

AIMS

The aims of the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION are *positive*.

The first is to spread the knowledge of the Church's principles, and especially of those doctrines and practices which at the present time seem rather in danger of being forgotten or obscured. Of course it may be said that this is a duty of the Church at large. This fact, however, does not render the activities of the Union any the less useful. Efficient work on special lines is done within the Church by temperance societies, brotherhoods and guilds for devotional and philanthropic purposes. In particular, it seems reasonable, that as we have a great missionary organization for the spread of the Gospel, so there should be a corresponding society, equally general in membership, having for its aim the development of the faith in its fulness among those who profess it, matching with its idea of *intension* the missionary idea of *extension*. We would have the Church not only carry the Word of God everywhere, but like the great Apostle, not shun anywhere "to declare the whole counsel of God." Catholic as applied to the Church, means *the whole faith for all men*.

The AMERICAN CHURCH UNION emphasises the former, as the missionary organization does the latter part of this definition.

There is to-day special need for work like this. Multitudes from other religious bodies have flocked into the Church and have been admitted to full membership, often with little, sometimes with no instruction in Church principles. They do not know how foreign to the Church's teaching are some of the ideas they have brought with them. Even those who have been brought up in the Church are frequently uninformed on matters of the gravest importance. To ground the Church's

own members in her historic faith, to open to them the knowledge of their Catholic heritage, this is the first aim the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION sets before it.

The desire for unity is rife to-day among Christians of various denominations. Many see in our own communion the future rallying point of the now discordant elements of a distracted Christendom. Until, however, we can agree among ourselves, it is idle to expect others to agree with us, and the only basis upon which the Church's own members can come to agreement is that of her full, authoritative teaching. To present this teaching courteously and charitably, but with perfect frankness and without compromise, cannot fail in the long run to win the respect and confidence of our communities.

The second aim of the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION is no less important: to defend the Church against the assaults of heresy. No age so far has been without false teachers; it would be strange indeed were ours the first exception. On the contrary, there are many reasons why our danger should be greater than that in the past. The rapid progress of science, the popularization of knowledge, the social changes that result from invention, commerce and travel, have begotten among us an impatience of antiquity and a love of novelty which rudely challenge the Church's ancient claims. While the Church may not alter her "faith once for all delivered," there is undoubtedly a need of expounding it so as to meet the special wants of our time. Those who in their desire to have religious thought keep abreast of the age have approached present problems, have not always escaped the pitfalls of error. We

need not consider the causes; error is destructive whether it proceed from the head or the heart. Error must be met with the full and confident restatement of the truth. Controversy is indeed to be deprecated; but controversy is better than surrender without a battle. That truth is mighty and will prevail does not mean that the truth will take care of itself. We must "earnestly contend," St. Jude warns us, if it is to be preserved in its purity among us.

Here again it will be said, this is the duty of the Church at large. True, but as we also know, what is everybody's business is apt to be left undone. The secular press glories in exploiting strange and erroneous opinions sensationally advocated within the Church. The average priest and layman reads, grumbles a little and—does nothing. Few have the time, the knowledge, the ability, the opportunity to discuss the issue. As a result the error too often goes unchallenged. It is here the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION has a useful work to do, correcting these errors by an appeal to the standards of the Church, and insisting that her established doctrines be adhered to. As when through the indifference of citizens laws are left uninforced or administered in the interests of graft or other crime, public-spirited men band themselves together to insist on righteous government, so the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION in regard to its second aim, may be properly described as a law-enforcement movement in the City of our God, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The attitude of the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION is not one of pessimism. Never for one instant will it admit that the gates of hell are prevailing against the Church of Christ. On the con-

trary, its attitude is one of confidence and hope. Sure that for the past eighteen centuries the Church has kept essentially unimpaired, her Faith, her Bible, her Ministry, her Sacraments ; believing that during the long lapse of centuries these have fully demonstrated their truth and helpfulness, the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION sees in them, fully known, properly appreciated and constantly used, the means of overcoming all our difficulties. Therefore it regards their preservation a matter of supreme importance. Some will always be carried away temporarily by religious innovation ; nevertheless in the end the Saviour's proverb comes true : "No man having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new ; for he saith, The old is better.

PRINCIPLES

In drawing up its Declaration of Principles the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION has been guided by what it conceives to be the practical needs of the Church. Other principles may seem to be in themselves of greater importance ; those selected seem now in special danger of becoming obscured. In drawing them up, the effort has been made to catch in every instance the *spirit of the Church's formularies,* and, where possible, to follow the *Church's own words.* While drawn with all due care, the language used does not profess to be so carefully guarded as to render a wrong interpretation impossible. That would be vain, for as we know to our cost, the Creeds themselves are not incapable of being misinterpreted and explained away. It is believed, however, that if the Declaration is read in the historic and ordinary sense of the words, its meaning will be found perfectly plain.

Declaration of Principles of the American Church Union

1. That the Protestant Episcopal Church is an integral part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

2. That the Church's Creeds are to be interpreted and believed as held by the undivided Church.

3. That, as declared in the Preface to the Ordinal,* the Ministry of the Church has been from the Apostles' time, threefold; and those only are to execute the functions of this Ministry in this Church who have had Episcopal consecration or ordination.

4. That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired.

5. That the Church's Sacraments derive from Christ vital power to confer grace by the operation of the Holy Ghost.**

6. That the Marriage tie is indissoluble, as is set forth in the Church's Form of Solemnization of Matrimony.†

7. That persons unconfirmed by a Bishop, who are known to be neither ready nor desirous to receive Confirmation, ought not to be admitted to the Holy Communion, nor enrolled as Communicants of the Church.‡

METHODS AND WORK

The methods adopted by the AMERICAN CHURCH UNION for the prosecution of its

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* Prayer Book, page 509.
**See second answer on the Sacraments in the Church Catechism.
† Prayer Book, page 278; questions to those who are to be married.
‡ First Rubric after the Confirmation Service; Prayer Book, page 276.

work are twofold. The first, spiritual; prayer and preaching. These, though more important, need no comment. Of the second, the more material means, a few words may be said.

As opportunity arises and means permit, present-day tracts bearing upon the Union's principles are published. These are distributed freely to those who will make good use of them. Where they are asked for in quantity, the Union would be glad to have the postage paid, as our bills for postage are very large. Postage may be calculated at the rate of one cent for each four leaflets. But the Union aims at being more than a mere tract repository. Tracts are mailed to individuals whose addresses have been secured, on subjects likely to prove interesting to them. Thus a post-office mission is established to the farthest points of the Church's jurisdiction.

The leaflets thus far issued are as follows:

1. Constitution and By-Laws, with list of officers for 1908-1909.

2. Descriptive application blank for membership.

3. "The American Church Union: Its Origin, Organization, Aims, Principles, Methods and Work." By Rev. Elliot White, Rector of Grace Church, Newark, N. J. This leaflet you are reading is a copy of the second revised edition.

4. "Canon Nineteen: What It Is, How We Got It, and How It Works." Report by the Literature Committee of the Union of a thorough investigation of this law by correspondence with the Bishops charged with its administration.

5. "The General Convention."* By Colonel

*Only a few copies of this popular leaflet remain.

Edwin A. Stevens, Deputy to the General Convention from the Diocese of Newark.

6. "The Christian Ministry." By Rev. F. N. Westcott, B. D., Rector of St. James' Church, Skaneateles, N. Y., and author of "Catholic Principles."

7. "The American Catholic Name."* By Mr. F. C. Moorehouse, Editor of *The Living Church.*

8. "Union or Unity?" By Rev. Frank L. Vernon, D. D., Dean of St. Luke's Cathedral, Portland, Maine. (Second Edition.)

9. "No Open Pulpit." The text of the unamended and amended Canon Nineteen, the Memorial on the subject of this Canon, signed by 1175 Priests, and presented to the House of Bishops, and the Bishops' reply. Compiled by Rev. Charles Mercer Hall, Rector of Holy Cross, Kingston, N. Y.

The Union also reprinted from the *New York Churchman*, an article by the Bishop of Maryland on the Preamble. It is our purpose to issue, from time to time, reprints from articles that may be found helpful. As these articles, from the nature of the case, cannot be subject to the Union's revision or emendation, they are placed in a series by themselves; the Union, while endorsing the main contentions, does not necessarily set its approval on every detail of the argument.

During the year 1909-1910 the Corresponding Secretary sent out 13,705 of these leaflets.

Another work of the Union during this same year was the successful effort to secure a common plan of action for those who, dissatisfied with

*Out of print. Tracts on the same general lines will be issued during the coming year.

Canon Nineteen, were anxious to bring forward amendments in various forms. This involved a very extensive correspondence with individuals and societies, on the part of the President and Corresponding Secretary. As a result, a general agreement was reached to await the response of the House of Bishops to the memorial. It is widely believed that in this way the Convention was saved a stormy and perhaps acrimonious debate.

In two instances the officers of the Union have undertaken remonstrances when Canon Nineteen was flagrantly violated; it is believed with helpful results.

In conclusion, the author quotes from the last report of the Union, October, 1910: "The time has come for a great enlargement of the Union and its work. We have been in existence about two and a half years. We came into existence largely as the result of a crisis, revealing widespread ignorance of Church Principles on the part of many. We were at first viewed with considerable suspicion, and sometimes charged with being 'soreheads,' trouble breeders, disturbers of the Church's peace. The Union has pleased its friends and disappointed its foes. It has shown wisdom, moderation and charity, under trying circumstances. It has made good. It is constantly proving its usefulness. We deserve support; let us ask it of the Church."

May we not have yours?

A Prayer for The American Church Union

BLESS, O Lord, we beseech Thee, the work of The American Church Union, and grant that all its intentions, objects and operations may ever be promoted by Thy most gracious favor, and furthered by Thy continual help, to Thy honor and glory and the good of Thy Holy Church. Give to all the members and associates of this Union the spirit of unity, peace and true concord; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. *Amen.*

Those who desire further information concerning the American Church Union, or who would like to become members, are asked to write to the Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Elliot White, 960 Broad Street, Newark, N. J., who will gladly give their communication his careful attention.